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ABSTRACT

Researchers suggest that children of minority groups are so confused by the customs of the dominant culture represented in schools that their English literacy learning suffers. An ethnographic study examined the literacy learning of two language minority children in a suburban kindergarten program. Using unstructured interviews, the focal informants of the study were the two children (a female Southeast Asian and a male Indian), the kindergarten teacher, and the teacher of English as a second language (ESL). Other sources and methods of collecting information consisted of a year of participant observations in the school and at home, field trips, parent conferences, and documents such as written home-school communication, student work, report cards, testing information, and classroom materials. The minority children's understanding of holidays and celebrations were studied to assess whether understanding affected English literacy, as illustrated by the tensions during 12 classroom holidays and celebrations, ranging from Christmas to Columbus Day to kindergarten graduation. Findings revealed that the children misunderstood most holidays and celebrations and that the school staff misunderstood the children's confusions. The lack of communication between school and families exacerbated the difficulties for the children. Results suggested that: (1) this program and comparable programs include the study of similarities and differences between people; (2) multicultural literature be integrated into the program; (3) appreciation of diverse holidays and celebrations be incorporated across the curriculum; and (4) home-school communication be strengthened. (BAC)

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Tensions for Language Minority Children: Celebrations in a Kindergarten Classroom

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Introduction

Similar to early childhood programs across the United States, East Side Elementary School celebrated Columbus Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Valentine's Day, President's birthdays, St. Patrick's Day, and Easter. However, because the school community had customs primarily related to the Roman Catholic tradition, secular and religious aspects of school celebrations often became blurred. Additionally, the seasons of the year were interwoven into the holidays. The windows of the school signaled the special times several weeks before the date; hallways and classrooms were decorated with representative symbols. September windows displayed autumn leaves, apples and pumpkins, October classrooms exhibited Columbus artwork and Halloween ghosts and goblins, November halls showed pilgrims, turkeys and Native Americans, and December saturated the senses with Christmas tinsel and trappings. January emphasized winter with snow flakes, sleds and polar bears positioned throughout the school. As February approached, the polar bears carried red valentines; these were replaced with shamrocks for St. Patrick's Day. Easter rabbits appeared immediately after March 17. Soon large cut-out daisies, tulips and daffodils announced spring and early summer.

Peley and Raji were two language minority children in the kindergarten program at East Side Elementary, a K-2 suburban school in Northeastern United States. Peley's family, emigrated from Southeast Asia and Raji's family emigrated from Bombay, India. Both children were born in the United States and learned English and their home languages simultaneously. During the school year, the children and their families visibly struggled during holidays and celebrations.

In September, Mrs. Starr, the kindergarten teacher, noticed that Peley and Raji were having difficulties socializing. She stated, "Peley and Raji are not making

friends. Raji stands back and observes most class activities while Peley criticizes any student near her." Mrs. Starr believed that it was important for students to have positive relationships in her classroom if they were to develop their reading, writing, listening and speaking. Therefore, she was worried about Peley's and Raji's English literacy development.

Researchers suggest that children of minority groups are so confused by the customs of the dominant culture represented in schools that their English literacy learning suffers (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990; Cummins, 1994). Therefore, it is important to study classroom cultures in order to determine ways to allieviate tensions related to cultural differences. The purpose of this paper is to present a portion of the data from a year-long ethnography in a Northeastern suburban kindergarten program which described the literacy learning of two language minority children from the sociocultural perspective. Specifically, scenes portraying the tensions during classroom holidays and celebrations will be presented and recommendations for the prevention of struggles in similar classrooms will be suggested.

Related Research

Researchers who embrace the sociocultural perspective observe participants in classroom communities as they are constructing classroom culture (Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1990; Kantor, Miller & Fernie, 1992). From this social constructivist approach, the meaning of literacy is derived from social interaction across and within cultural settings (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986; Rogoff, 1986; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). Therefore, children become literate within the cultures of their home and school communities (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Schiefflin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Wells, 1986; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Dyson, 1989; Moll,1992). However, the school curriculum in the United States usually reflects the European American perspective

only (Nieto, 1992; Banks, 1993; Garcia, 1994). Moreover, the early childhood curriculum usually concentrates on European American holidays and celebrations throughout the school year (Cohen & Coffin, 1991; Igoa, 1995). Therefore, language minority children find themselves in a confusing setting which requires that they understand and reconcile differences between home and school (Wong-Filmore, 1983; Verhoeven, 1987; Swain, 1988; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). Additionally, educators often ignore differences between home and school believing that language minority children will learn to "fit" into the classroom culture if given time (Edwards & Young, 1992; Faltis, 1993, McCaleb, 1994). Consequently, language minority children frequently struggle with English literacy learning because home and school connections are weak. Furthermore, they may experience alienation and disempowerment which often leads to school drop out (Cummins, 1986; Verhoeven, 1987; Nieto, 1992).

Since the early childhood years are critical in the development of literacy learning (Wells, 1986; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Dyson, 1989), studying early childhood, language minority classroom experiences may help us understand and alleviate their struggles (Garcia, 1986; Edelsky, 1986; Teale & Martinez, 1989; McCaleb, 1994). The focus of this paper will be upon two language minority children's struggles during school holidays and celebrations. Since such festivities are key components in this kindergarten program as well as early childhood programs across the United States, this study contributes to the understanding of language minority children's confusions and resulting classroom tensions which affect English literacy learning.

Recent research recognizes literacy learning as a social phenomenon which is best examined in the context of social situations (Bloome & Green, 1982).

Therefore, ethnographic research was selected as the methodology which allowed me to observe and record data in a natural classroom setting. The year's "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) presented information in manner similar to a feature length film representation (Rist, 1978).

Methodology

Focal Informants

Peley

Peley's serious brown face and almond-shaped, dark eyes were accented with a swishing, long, black pony tail tied in an ornate gold and glitter clasp from Southeast Asia. Average in height and weight for the typical kindergarten student, she would often be dressed in a size-too-small, stone-washed jeans, dingy, turtle-neck , cotton shirt and worn sneakers.

Raji

Raji's eyes were the first characteristic noticed when he slowly walked into the classroom. They were dark saucers with thick and silky lashes and eyebrows which dominated his small, evenly featured, black, satin face. He was smaller than the other children and his snug, black cotton trousers revealed white socks and grey velcro-strapped sneakers. His black and red heavy winter sweater was standard attire, no matter what the season or temperature.

Mrs. Starr

Mrs. Starr's petite frame was in constant motion, hugging, praising, urging, explaining, singing and laughing. Her shoulder length, softly curled, blonde hair and naturally rosy complexion encircled a steady grin. Mrs. Starr's European American background which did not include experiences associated with the cultures of ethnic-minorities was similar to the people in the school and community. In the past,

children had been placed in her classroom from Southeast Asia, India, Puerto Rico, Italy, Pakistan and Poland, but she had not been trained to work with diverse groups of people.

Mrs. Brown

Mrs. Brown, the ESL teacher, was a slightly built woman, in her early thirties, with curly, soft, short blonde-brown hair, pale white complexion, gentle voice and even sweeter smile. She had earned her teacher degree in secondary English education and was hired as a 3/5 teacher, working three days a week. She traveled among four elementary buildings serving twenty-five students who were placed in English as a second language programs. Mrs. Brown attended TESOL conferences, used the materials left from previous teachers and read materials about TESOL methods and materials. It was the school district's philosophy that Mrs. Brown and classroom teachers would give language minority children the necessary help with the English language which would encourage them to fit quickly into the school community.

The Setting

Classmates

The children in this kindergarten program were from predominantly, White working class families. Peley and Raji appeared physically different in this classroom and school community where white skin, blond hair and blue eyes were the norm for students and staff. Also, their clothing contrasted with classmates. The female students had numerous colorful coordinated outfits resembling little women. The male classmates wore brand name trousers and jeans with jerseys of famous sport teams. Peley and Raji wore the same two or three sets of clothing throughout the school year.

The kindergarten Program

The kindergarten program was created within a K-2 elementary school in a

large, suburban, predominantly White school district in the Northeast. Each kindergarten classroom had one kindergarten teacher; one teaching assistant circulated among the three classrooms. Additionally, each class also had one high school student as an aide. The teens chosen for this work had expressed an interest in child development and were actually fulfilling requirements for a course by working in the kindergarten.

There were never more than five or six students of color in the total kindergarten program of sixty-five children; they were divided among the three classrooms. Diversity of race and/or culture were not associated with appreciation for differences, but only related to federal or state guidelines for classroom pull-out programs, such as ESL, speech, and reading.

Peley's and Raji's readiness test scores and the kindergarten staff judgements placed them in an above average reading group in the kindergarten program. However, the English proficiency exam administered by the ESL teacher and the school's knowledge that the home language was not English placed the children in the ESL pull-out program.

The kindergarten staff believed literacy learning was not simply reading and writing, but the meaning making which comes from successful social interactions within the classroom community (Bloome & Green, 1982). Thematic learning centers, whole group mini-lessons followed by small group activities encouraged reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Throughout the school year, kindergarten classrooms were decorated with tinsel, crepe paper and shiny foil letters announcing each holiday. The curriculum revolved around literature, music, games and arts and crafts related to the upcoming holiday; classroom parties were arranged and parents contributed refreshments and

helping hands during the celebrations. Along with the holidays, kindergartens celebrated birthdays, marvelous mothers day, fabulous father's day, pajama day and kindergarten olympics. This plethora of special days served to keep the classroom in perpetual anticipation of the next festivity.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism served as the theoretical framework based on the premise that the way people act depends on their interpretation of a situation and the meaning they give it. The meaning is derived from social interactions and modified through social process (Blumer, 1969). I became part of the kindergarten classroom environment and experienced "prolonged intense social interaction while collecting data systematically and unobtrusively" (Bogdan, 1972). A year of participant observations took place in the school two to three times a week during three hour sessions along with one to two hour monthly home visits. I attended field trips, evening events, field trips and parent conferences. Field notes were recorded after all home and school visits. Also, hours of in depth, unstructured interviews of parents, educators and the two children were collected throughout the school year, as well as, documents, such as written home/school communication, student work, report cards, testing information and classroom materials.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and continuous from the beginning of data collection, using the constant comparative methodology (Glaser, 1978). Data were read and reread for preliminary themes used in the analysis. As more data were considered, themes were refined to form the final coding categories. Recurring patterns offered explanations for the cultural conflicts and struggles in the classroom which were grounded in the descriptive evidence related to holidays and celebrations

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings revealed that Peley and Raji misunderstood most holidays and celebrations and the school staff misunderstood the children's confusions about the holidays and celebrations. The lack of communication between school and families exacerbated the difficulties for the children. Since holidays and celebrations were such an important part of the school year, the children's confusions were reflected in their literacy learning.

Findings

Columbus Day

Columbus Day echoed the traditional story, songs and activities practiced in the schools of our country during most of the last century. Stories were read aloud in class and the music teacher taught Columbus songs. Each child made construction paper cut and paste "Columbus ships-in-a-bottle" to take home.

The ESL teacher, Mrs. Brown attempted to explain the Columbus story to Peley and Raji. She laid a map of the World on the table in her room and began pointing out India and Cambodia. Peley sprawled over it, while Raji sat in a chair.

Mrs. Brown: Peley, this is Cambodia. This is where your family lived. Isn't that right? Were you born in Cambodia?

Peley: (Indignantly) No! I was born in the United States. I was born in the United States! My mother told me!

Mrs. Brown: (Calmly) Fine Peley. Raji, were you born in India?

Raji: (Softly) I don't know.

Mrs. Brown: (While pointing at the World map) Now here is Cambodia.

Peley: (Immediately interjects loudly) I was born in the United States! I was born in the United States.

Mrs. Brown: (Calmly) I know Peley and here's India.
(Mrs. Brown moved her finger from India to Spain.)

Mrs. Brown: (Enthusiasticslly) Columbus sailed from Spain and discovered America!
(Mrs. Brown moved her finger across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States.)

Mrs. Brown: He came to America just like your family. That's why we celebrate Columbus Day.
(Neither Raji nor Peley responded to the statement. Mrs. Brown then brought out a globe, night light.)

Mrs. Brown: This is my son's night light, but he let me bring it to school. You can see the World is round. Raji, put your finger on India and we'll turn the globe to find America, where we live.
(Raji put his finger on India and then he put the finger from his other hand on America.)

Peley: (pleading) Let me try! Let me try!

(Mrs. Brown helped her put fingers on Cambodia and America.)

Peley: (Immediately after) I want to play the vowel game. I want to play the vowel game! Pleeease!"

Mrs. Brown: (Emphatically) No, Peley, not until Thursday. There isn't enough time.

Peley: (Pleading) I want to write on the board. I want to write on the board!

Mrs. Brown: (Exasperated tone) Okay, but you must practice writing your names.

(Raji wrote on the blackboard "Raji" making the"R" extra large. Peley quickly wrote "Peley Lim Chinh".)

Mrs. Brown: Chinh? Peley, is that your name too. I thought your name was Peley Lim?

Peley: (Emphatically and loudly) No! My name is Peley Lim Chinh! Peley Lim Chinh! That's my real name!

Mrs. Brown: (Calmly) All right, Peley and Raji, time to go back to class.

Both children dropped their pieces of chalk immediately and raced to the door.

Mrs, Brown warned them to wait for her and reminded them about not running in the halls. She believed the children did not understand her Columbus lesson and was annoyed with Peley's behaviors. "She takes over the class and Raji doesn't say anything. She is a difficult child. I wonder where she was born. Do her parent's speak any English? What's her real name?!" Mrs. Brown also seemed to realize that she knew very little about Peley's and Raji's backgrounds.

Halloween

Immediately after Columbus Day, the ghosts, witches, jack-o-lanterns and skeletons materialized throughout East Side Elementary School. As October 31, approached more drawings, cut outs and pieces of children's literature became visible from the second floor library to the basement music room. Songs, books, videos and math games reflected the coming event. Notes went home for refreshments and party plans. Discussions about costumes and scarey creatures occupied sharing time, the discovery center spider unit and teacher read-aloud time. "What are ya gonna be Halloween," Annie asked as five children were making their pipe cleaner spiders at the discovery center. "I'm a princess." "I'm gonna be a witch." "Little Mermaid", I'm a football player."

While making the paper ghosts, another group talked about their costumes. "I'm a queen." "I'm a Ninja turtle, Michelangelo." "My mom bought me a bat costume." "I'm a little devil." "Will you wear a mask?" "Nop! My mom's painting my face. It's safer." "I'm wearing a turtle mask. It fits my face good." The teaching assistant asked Peley, "What are you going to be?" Peley didn't answer.

The interpretations of Halloween seemed to demonstrate cultural confusion and struggle for Peley. On Halloween, Peley arrived in school with her face painted red; she carried a tube of red lipstick. Her costume was a rumpled, tattered, commercial

Halloween costume of white rayon satin. It fit so tightly over her jeans and t-shirt, the seams barely held together. Her molded plastic mask was a blonde, blue-eyed princess complete with a yellow, molded, plastic crown. Peley immediately went to a mirror in the bathroom and put lipstick on her lips. She then placed the mask over her face and announced that she was "Barbie Doll". Classmates repeatedly asked, "Who are you?" Peley would remove her mask exposing her red painted face and pronounce emphatically, "Barbie Doll!"

Most students wore newly purchased costumes and masks which they removed from bright boxes. A few home-crafted costumes indicated great parental preparation. Disguises included a dog, bear, bat, gypsy, bride, queen, fairy god-mother, devil, cat, pumpkin, and several ghosts, witches, pirates and Ninja Turtles. One student's face was an artistically painted green Ninja Turtle. Raji also appeared as a Ninja Turtle. He wore his red Ninja pajamas and carried his green molded plastic turtle mask. When asked which turtle he represented he quietly responded, "Raphael."

Mrs. Starr began the Halloween celebration when several mothers with refreshments came through the door. The mothers immediately went to their own children and gave them hugs and costume adjustments. Mrs. Starr then gathered the masqueraded assembly around the big brown rug. Each student was asked to come forward and explain his or her disguise. Mrs. Starr made a positive comment about each.

Raji's costume was appropriate for the Halloween party, but Peley seemed confused about the concept of wearing a mask and painting one's face. She knew "Barbie" as an important children's doll, but didn't know how to portray "Barbie" in costume. Halloween was difficult for Peley.

Thanksgiving

Turkeys, Native American head bands, and Pilgrim hats materialized by the end of the first week in November. Thanksgiving preparations began with stories about the first Thanksgiving, and making Pilgrim hats and feathered Indian headdresses. Songs about turkeys and feasts were learned. After one story about Thanksgiving, the teacher and children discussed the meaning of the word "thankful." Next, the class was given an assignment to draw a picture about the Thanksgiving story or things we are thankful for at Thanksgiving. The children drew pictures of Indians, Pilgrims, turkeys, families, money, birthday parties etc. Raji's crayon drawing depicted a table with fish on it. Fish were never mentioned in the story or discussion. Students near him commented, "Fish for Thanksgiving! Yucky!", "Nobody eats fish for Thanksgiving!"

Peley drew a picture of herself and called it "sister." She had an older brother, but no sister. The meaning of Thanksgiving in the United States seemed a puzzle to both Raji and Peley.

Raji left the United States right after Thanksgiving to visit relatives in India for two months. Peley's problems with holidays and special days continued.

Christmas

By December 12th, Christmas was everywhere in the school with reindeer, three feet tall candy canes, wreathes, holly and bows. In the kindergarten classrooms, glitter and tinsel, red Santas and green trees abounded. Additionally, the parents' organization of the school also sponsored the Christmas Store as a money making project for the school which also provided Christmas shopping opportunities for the children. The store contained new and used small items which were sold for less than a dollar. Mrs. Starr reported that Peley's father had come to the Christmas Shop and purchased gifts with Peley.

Because of numerous extra activites added to the kindergarten day during the

week before Christmas, presents were made for parents during reading group time. What follows is a description of the process:

First, Mrs. Starr read a poem about two hands helping which was typed on a sheet of white paper; there was no discussion of the poem. She then began, "When I call your name we are going to make Christmas presents for your parents. While you are waiting, you may read and share books quietly with a friend."

Mrs. Starr had placed big books of Old MacDonald and Mother Goose and little book copies on the rug where the reading group usually met. The children immediately paired or tripled. Peley took the Old MacDonald big book to the edge of the rug and hid behind it while reading the words to herself. She remained there as children were called individually or volunteered.

Each child was allowed to choose a piece of red, green or blue construction paper The child's hands were then placed in white paste, palms down and imprinted on the construction paper. The poem was then glued between the hands. All of the students had their hands imprinted and class time was nearing the end when Mrs. Starr noticed Peley behind the big book and exclaimed, "I didn't get your hands Peley!" Peley slowly stood up and walked to The table. She frowned and said, "Yuk!" Mrs. Starr responded, "Peley, don't you want a Christmas present for your parents?" Peley did not reply. Mrs. Starr placed Peley's brown hands in the white paste. Peley continued making her "Yuk " sounds and washed her hands immediately after the imprint. The bell rang as Peley's imprinted white hands dried on the blue paper.

Peley's struggle seemed apparent when she hid behind the big book. She was not happy about placing her hands in the paste; a Christmas gift for her parents did not seem motivating. During a visit to Peley's home a few days before Christmas, there appeared to be no visible signs of the holiday inside or outside her house.

New Year's Day

The second day back to school after Christmas vacation, Peley faced another holiday. In her ESL class, Mrs. Brown attempted to explain New Year's celebrations. She showed Peley a picture of a New Year's Party. The people in the picture had party hats and horns. Food, drinks and party decorations abounded. People were dancing singing and looking happy. Mrs. Brown began the lesson.

Mrs. Brown: Peley, have you ever been to a New Year's Party?
(Peley looked at the picture)

Peley: Which hat is different? (pause) Which hat is wrong?

Mrs. Brown: See the horns. Find the one you like.
(Peley did not respond)

Mrs. Brown: Would you like me to read you a story about the picture?"

Peley: (Loudly) No, I'm hungry!

Mrs. Brown: Didn't you have breakfast?
(Peley shook her head in the negative)

Mrs. Brown: If you want to do well in school, you must eat breakfast.

Mrs. Brown began reading a story to Peley about the history of New Years' Eve.

Peley paid no attention. She left her seat and walked to the book shelf. Mrs. Brown called her back and continued the story. Next, Peley blurted, "I want to play a game.!" Mrs. Brown, with an impatient tone in her voice, asked, "Peley, do you want to leave?" Peley's enthusiastic response was, "Yes!"

Peley seemed unable to relate to New Year's Eve as it was presented. The teacher / student struggle for understanding seemed apparent in this brief exchange.

Valentine's Day

The next major holiday arrived in mid-January. Hearts of every size and shade of red decorated the school. Silver and gold tinsel, foil-trimmed hearts and pink and red paper chains filled the kindergarten. On Valentine's Day, the children wore red and white shirts, skirts, dresses or heart pins. Peley wore her jeans and a blue turtle neck, but the party proved successful for her. She wrote Valentines to the whole class and was able to deliver them personally to her classmates or their mailbags. She was one of the few kindergarteners capable of reading and writing at such an advanced level. Many of the students thanked her for the Valentines as she handed them the card. She was doubly pleased to see that she had received so many cards in her mailbag. The Valentine's Party appeared to be a victory. Mrs. Starr was pleased to see Peley fitting in and expressed joyfully, "Isn't Peley having a wonderful time?! It's great to see her so pleased with herself!"

Mrs. Starr was unaware that red is the color of love and friendship in many Asian cultures. As a result, Peley and her family could see the connection between their customs and Valentine's Day.

Marvelous Mother's Day

Raji had returned to the United States from India the week before Valentine's Day, but re-entry into the kindergarten class did not occur until the week following

Valentine's Day. On Monday morning, he was brought into immediate preparations for Marvelous Mother's Day. M was the letter for the third week in February which was to culminate in a celebration on Friday especially for mothers.

Discussion of Marvelous Mother's Day caused several children to become upset. Some teary-eyed children openly expressed their concerns to Mrs. Starr, "I don't have a mother." "My mother has to work." "My mother can't leave my baby sister" My mother can't come." Mrs. Starr responded with, "Bring a marvelous friend or ask your father or grandmother to come. One child said, "I don't have a marvelous friend and my mother and father can't come." Mrs. Starr tried to soothe their concerns, "I'll be you friend!"

Marvelous Mother's Day had a specific scheme. Children were told to think about their marvelous mothers or friends and tell marvelous things about them. On the day before the celebration, children drew pictures of their "marvelous mothers" or friends with "marvelous" things around them. At the party, the children were told that they would tell about their marvelous mothers or friends. Then their guests would find the pictures of themselves created by the children and stapled to a Marvelous Mother's bulletin board.

While Peley and Raji were at ESL class, the kindergarten children received instructions for Marvelous Mother's Day. When Peley and Raji returned to class, they were told to quickly draw a picture of their mothers for Marvelous Mother's Day. Peley responded, "My mother and father can't come." Mrs. Starr then asked, "How about your grandmother?" Peley didn't respond; she began to draw. When asked about her drawing, she said, "It's my grandmother."

On Marvelous Mother's Day, fathers, mothers, grandparents and friends were seated in a circle on the big brown rug. Miss Corky, the teen kindergarten aide, was

assigned as Peley's Marvelous Friend. Mrs. Starr also became Jeffy's "marvelous" friend, since he claimed to have no "marvelous" friend to bring to school. Mrs. Starr positioned herself in front of the squirming mass of adults seated in kindergarten chairs with children at their feet and in their laps. Some children were also standing between adult knees. Peley sat on the floor in front of Miss Corky's chair. Next to Peley, Raji sat alone in front of an empty chair, waiting for his mother. Mrs. Starr began the party five minutes late in the hope that Raji's mother would arrive soon. She asked Raji, "Raji are you sure your mother is coming?" Raji nodded, "Yes." Soon after this exchange, Raji's mother and three, year-old sister tip-toed into the classroom. Mrs. Fuller, the teaching assistant, ushered her to the chair in the circle. At that point,the children were about half way around the circle describing "marvelous" mothers and friends.

When it was Peley's turn to tell about her "marvelous" friend; she didn't speak. Her picture had been about her grandmother. Mrs. Starr quickly moved on to Raji. His mother and sister sat in the chair behind him. Mrs. Starr asked, "Raji, do you want to talk about your "marvelous" mother? She's right behind you. Think about your picture." Raji remained silent and Mrs. Starr moved on with, "Okay, thank you Raji." Raji and Peley were the only two children who did not speak.

When refreshments were served, Raji, his mother and sister sat together in the corner of the room while other children and adults mingled. Peley sat alone. Her "marvelous" teen friend was talking with a teen aide across the room. This celebration seemed to be yet another struggle for both Raji and Peley.

St. Patrick's Day

Preparation for St. Patricks' Day began two weeks before the party. Mrs. Starr delighted the class with her imaginary "Lucky the Leprachaun." Lucky invaded the

classroom each morning before the children arrived and accomplished mischievous acts. On the first morning, Lucky Leprachaun walked through green paint and left foot prints throughout the room. The following days, he dumped waste baskets, messed up book shelves and scribbled on the blackboards with green chalk. The children were challenged to figure out how to make him behave. Irish tales were read and songs were sung with green dominating the classroom world. On St. Patrick's Day, two children in the class did not wear green, Raji and Tim. Tim had been absent for the last week. Comments were made by the children, "No green!" "Where's the green?" "You're not St. Patricks." Raji did not respond. Raji apparently did not get the message about the importance of wearing green on St. Patrick's Day. Peley, however, wore a green turtle neck sweater.

Easter

The day after the St. Patrick's celebration, flop-eared, ribboned, Easter rabbits materialized everywhere in the school. A bulletin board saying "Spring has hatched." appeared at the entrance of Mrs. Starr's room. Even though Easter was a month away, the wire across the room was hung with pink, foil letters anonouncing, "Happy Easter." Many projects were developed around Easter and the signs of spring. The children saw eggs hatch in an incubator. They cut and pasted paper, hatched eggs, flowers, birds and rabbits.

In a discussion about the picture book, Signs of Spring, the children responded to the question "What is a sign of spring?" Peley said, "Snow melting." Raji said, "Trees turn brown." Mrs. Starr corrected, "You mean green, Raji." Other answers from the children were, "eggs", "birds", "flowers" and "sun."

During that month, the class colored bunnies for a newspaper contest. They learned to write the word "Easter" in the "Writing to Read" lab and composed

numerous stories about Easter such as, "I like the Easter bunny. He brigs gele bens." "The Easter bunny has eggs." "The Easter bunny hops to my house." Peley and Raji colored bunnies and copied "Easter", but they never wrote or talked about Easter baskets or related traditions. Peley drew a green and red rabbit and wrote, "The rabit is sile It is fall." Raji drew an orange rabbit and wrote, "Rabits hop. et to mch eggs. " Easter was yet another holiday which they did not seem to understand.

Pajama Party

The pajama party was the culminating activity for the letter "P" week. All teachers, assistants and children wore their pajamas, nightgowns, robes and slippers to school. Even the principal joined activities for the day wearing her flannel night shirt. Peley wore an adult woman's striped knit, long sleeved shirt over her jeans and turtle neck sweater. She wore sneakers on her feet. Raji wore the Ninja Turtle pajamas used as a costume for Halloween and his velcro sneakers. Peley and one other girl, who had been absent for a week, were the only children not wearing pajamas or nightgown. Mrs. Starr wondered about Peley's parent's understanding of this celebration. She asked, "I wonder what they think we're doing in school? Maybe they think Peley has not understood the assignment."

Birthdays

Birthday's were another reason for celebration in this kindergarten classroom. There was a separate birthday cupcake bulletin board with each child's name and date on a construction paper cupcake. When a birthday neared, the teacher communicated with the parents and child to make birthday plans. Discussions took place concerning the refreshments to be served, who would serve refreshments and when they would be served. Mrs. Starr also added that the birthday child could bring a favorite pillow for the birthday spanking. This was the classroom custom of

tapping out the child's age, plus one for good luck, on his or her behind. The pillow was supposed to be protection. Mrs. Starr would ask the child to lean over with the pillow held behind. She would clap her hands the correct number while the class counted with her. The children would laugh and enjoy the trick.

Raji's birthday was in November. His mother and baby sister brought in cupcakes from a local bakery. They served them with the teacher's help. They watched Raji as the children sang and he was coronated with a personalized birthday crown created by Mrs. Starr.

Peley's birthday, however, did not go as smoothly. Her birthday was an event she had been thinking about for at least a month before the date. She repeatedly reminded Mrs. Starr who would remind Peley to bring the pillow for the birthday spanking. Peley would also mention that cookies would be the party treat.

The week before Peley's birthday, several notes were exchanged. Mrs. Starr initiated the process by sending a note home with Peley. The note explained that since the birthday fell on a Saturday, the best time to celebrate would be on the Monday after. This would allow more time for a party. Peley's family sent a note in response; it read as follows:

Dear Mrs. Starr
Peley want to share her
birthday party with her class mate
On Friday I will send cookies for
all the children if o.k. for you.
On 4.3.92
Thank You
Mrs. Lim

The script was half printed, half cursive and was on the back of a sheet of notebook paper. When Mrs. Starr received the note from Peley, she asked "Peley, when will you be having the party?" Peley responded, "Friday." Mrs. Starr continued, "But Peley I wrote your mother a note and told her that Monday would be better. On Friday there won't be enough time. When did you say she was bringing the cookies?" Peley answered again in a very quiet, shy voice, "Friday." Mrs. Starr then repeated in an exasperated tone, "Well, Peley, you must realize it will be a short party."

On Friday, Peley complained of a stomach ache during learning center. She was ignored, because it was assumed that birthday excitement was the cause. When the circle of children formed, anticipating the snack in celebration of "the birthday girl's happy day", Peley stood in the middle of the rug next to Mrs. Starr. She wore the birthday crown especially cut out for her by Mrs. Starr. It was made of purple construction paper and each point had a green star. Six stars symbolized six years of age and green and purple were Peley's favorite colors. Peley never brought in her birthday pillow, but Mrs. Starr faked the spanking by clapping hands behind Peley. The class sang "Happy Birthday"; Peley never smiled. The birthday snacks never came; the children hurriedly ate graham crackers from the class daily supply as they lined up for music. The following Tuesday, much to Mrs. Starr's surprise, Peley's father appeared before snack time with a box of vanilla cookies purchased from a store. Mrs. Starr thanked him and allowed Peley to distribute the cookies at snack time. There was no mention of Peley's birthday.

Kindergarten Graduation

The kindergarten graduation program preparations began in May. In music class, songs were learned and practiced. Students were chosen to memorize parts to be recited on stage in the auditeria. Invitations and thank yous were composed and

large sheet cakes ordered. Students completed personal yearbooks by drawing pictures of themselves in kindergarten and writing about their favorite things. They also helped the teacher make mortar boards from construction paper in the blue and white school colors.

On graduation morning, the parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters flocked in and packed the auditeria. Camcorders and cameras abounded. Most of the students wore new clothes, including Peley who wore a yellow and black linen-like tailored dress. It needed ironing, but she was proud to tell the girls, "I got a new dress for this." Raji wore his usual outfit, the fleur de lis sweater and dark, too short trousers. Peley had been selected by Mrs. Starr to recite a part. The children had rehearsed in front of the whole class for the last two weeks.

The students filed into the packed auditoria to Mr. Percy's piano playing "Pomp and Circumstance." Also, parents with cameras and camcorders lined the walls. Raji's parents and sister were present with camera. Peley's father, equipped with camcorder, recorded the entire graduation ceremony. The students lined up on stage with the help of the teachers, aides and assistant. The children sang the songs and said their verses in loud, clear voices. However,Peley could barely be heard saying, "I've learned my words and sounds and had my ups and downs." The principal spoke and gave out awards and diplomas to each child.

After the ceremony, Peley's grandmother attempted to give Peley a brown bag containing a box of graham crackers for the classroom reception. Peley pushed the bag aside and sternly spoke in Cambodian. Grandmother closed the bag quickly and looked down at the floor. Peley's father explained, "She see food on letter. She bring food."

The classroom reception was lively.Families mingled with each other and said

their thank yous to Mrs. Starr. Raji's family separated and stayed in one part of the room while Peley's family stood alone in another part of the room. Mrs. Starr made a point of going to the families and telling them how much she had enjoyed working with their children. Raji's family thanked her and said, "You will see our daughter soon. She will be in kindergarten in two years." Peley's father and grandmother bowed their heads and clearly spoke , "Thank you."

Mrs. Starr was pleased that Peley's and Raji's families had come to graduation. She believed that both children had made great gains in one year and was happy to see the parents recognizing their children's year. However, Mrs. Starr was concerned about the children's continuous socialization problems and confusions about class activities. She explained,

> Peley and Raji need friends. I hope they will read books over the summer and be part of a summer program with English speaking children. ESL class will help them next year too. They need to fit into their first grade classes quickly. They had a hard time this year. They seemed so confused about most of our activities.

Discussion

When Mrs. Starr first noticed Peley's and Raji's struggles, she tried to help them in all the ways her training, experiences and time allowed, but nonetheless, the year's journey through kindergarten was marked with frustrations which were clearly demonstrated in the tensions related to holidays and celebrations. Similar to the White middle class fifth grade teacher in Among SchoolChildren (1989), Kidder's year-long study, Mrs. Starr cared passionately about her school children, but did not understand their difficulties. Similar to the subjects in The Invisible Children (1978), Rist's ethnographic study of the integration of six African-American children in

an all White elementary school, Peley and Raji became problems for Mrs. Starr and other educators at East Side Elementary School when their behaviors appeared negative. The teachers in Rist's study, as well as this study, did not know how to help the children participate more positively in the classroom. In both studies, tensions emerged related to the children's struggle to fit into the school culture.

In this kindergarten study,holidays and celebrations seemed to stimulate the tensions and produce visible signs. The children's confusions about classroom holidays and celebrations, the parents' confusions about classroom holidays and celebrations and the kindergarten staff's neglect and misunderstanding of the home cultures of the language minority children contributed to the tensions. If the children appeared confused during events, the kindergaten staff assumed that the children would eventually understand each holiday through the literature studied, the music played and sung, the classroom assignments and the signs displayed throughout the school. They were surprised that the children were not joining in the experiences with joy or enthusiasm.

Furthermore, the children and their families were unable to effectively communicate with the kindergarten staff and the staff did not effectively communicate with the children and families. Notes, phone calls and conferences were misinterpreted by parents and staff causing tensions. Therefore, since each holiday and classroom celebration had its own unique details, the children and their families did not understand their meanings and could not relate them to their own culture's holidays and celebrations. Examples of confusions occurred throughout the school year. The meaning of colors, foods and dress were confused. Painting a face and wearing a mask; Thanksgiving with fish as the main course;not wearing green on St. Patrick's Day; red and green Easter rabbits were all instances of misunderstanding.

Additionally, it never occurred to the staff to explain the details of the holidays and celebrations or to include the children's home cultures in the classroom. Consequently, the children and their families and kindergarten staff remained puzzled throughout the school year and the tensions which were produced affected the evaluations of the children's literacy learning. The kindergarten staff recommended a summer literacy maintenance program, frequent visits to the public library and the continuation of the ESL program in the first grade.

Implications

This ethnography from the sociocultural perspective demonstrated the tensions when home and school cultures are not understood. It clearly points to the need for strengthening home/school communication and the importance of sharing diverse cultures in the classroom. Recommendations for this program and comparable programs include the study of similarities and differences among people, the integration of multicultural literature, the appreciation of diverse holidays and celebrations across the curriculum and the significance of strong home/school communication.

Children begin learning to discriminate against different cultures at an early age (Derman-Sparks, 1992), so it becomes necessary for early childhood classrooms to appreciate and celebrate diversity (Cohen & Coffin, 1991). Through the use of multicultural children's literature, the early childhood classroom can introduce a variety of perspectives in a positive manner(Coelho, 1994). Also, language minority families can help in the selection of authentic literature for the classroom (McCaleb, 1994).

Culturegrams published by state education departments, aid educators in the understanding of diverse groups of people who may be entering the school system (Igoa, 1995). Holidays and celebrations are explained and the means for effectively

communicating with the families help the teacher connect home and school. For instance, people throughout the world have similar holidays related to the seasons of the year which often fit easily into the present school curriculum. The Chinese New Year, Christmas, Kwanza and many more holidays are festivals which occur at the same time each year and can provide rich learning experiences. Similarly, numerous spring celebrations around world signal rebirth and planting.

Family classroom involvement is always important. Families who share their time, talents and interests benefit the entire school community. For language minority families, an invitation to share is a welcoming act (McCaleb, 1994; Watts-Pailliotet, 1994). It provides the family an opportunity to bring home language and culture into the school which becomes an empowering experience. As a result, a sense of responsibility to the school community may quickly ensue (Faltis, 1993). Additionally, volunteer interpreters are available in many communities and can help in parent/teacher conferences and the arrangement of programs .

Finally, because of the dynamic social, political and economic forces in the global community, language minority children have become the fastest growing school population in the United States. By the year 2026, they will be the majority population in elementary and secondary schools (Garcia, 1994). This study implies that schools may actually stimulate cultural confusion leading to negative learning experiences for language minority children. Since students must not be required to sacrifice their culture for school success (Coelho 1994; Peter, 1994), educators must take the first steps toward connecting the classroom culture with the children's cultures (Jacob & Sanday, 1976; McCaleb, 1994). Furthermore, teacher education programs must prepare educators with the means to enhance language minority classroom learning experiences (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990; Nieto, 1992; Bernhardt, 1994).

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